

From Truck Farms to Flower-Growing Greenhouses: The Era of Chicago's Urban Agriculture

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Luxembourg, a European territory since the Middle Ages, was once a powerful force until becoming part of the French Republic in 1795. After this, Luxembourgers started immigrating to the United States, representing many different ethnic groups including Irish, German, and English immigrants.

More Luxembourgers live in Chicago than in Luxembourg City. Their immigration can be traced back hundreds of years. The first Luxembourgers came to America in the 1630s and settled in New Amsterdam, New York. It was not until the 1830s that large numbers of these immigrants started settling in Chicago, particularly the Rogers Park area. The inexpensive farmland attracted them. The Luxembourgers were known for their truck farms and greenhouses. Today, most of the farms are gone; surviving greenhouses have relocated to the northern and northwest suburbs such as Niles or Des Plaines.

Aside from farming, most Luxembourgers were devout Roman Catholics. They belonged to the parishes of St. Michael, St. Nicholas, St. Boniface, St. Joseph, and St. Henry. In 1905 they built a new church for St. Henry in Chicago's West Ridge neighborhood. The parish was considered a "Luxembourger Parish," which had originally been built in the 1850s.

After the Luxembourgers' arrival in Chicago, they started buying farmland in West Ridge or the Ridge area near the Sulzer farm. They settled in these northern areas because it was cheaper and less expensive to build homes. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, most of Chicago was destroyed. To prevent another fire, Chicago houses had to be built with exterior fireproof walls, an expense many immigrants could not afford. Therefore they moved to Lake View and beyond where wooden houses could still be affordably built.

Most of West Ridge and surrounding areas contained vegetable gardens. Farmers grew beans, peas, melon and corn. Three of the earlier pioneers, John Muno, Adam Zender, and Peter Reinberg cultivated vegetables in the sandy soil. These farms became the largest shippers of celery in the Midwest. Another big farming area was the Budlong Region (Western and Berwyn streets today). Pickle farming was very popular here after Lyman A. Budlong, who was a pioneer in the pickle industry. The pickles were transported by wagons.

A transition from vegetable farming to flower growing came about as a result of the end of the Civil War. More than 360,000 Union soldiers lost their lives, creating a huge need for funeral flowers. In Chicago, flowers were sold to families whose loved ones were buried at Calvary Cemetery. Rosehill Cemetery also had many Civil War soldiers buried there.

Since so many people were in need of flowers, the Luxembourgers switched from cultivating vegetables to growing flowers yearround in large greenhouses that were quickly constructed. Muno, Zender, and Reinberg also switched to the flower growing business because it was so profitable. Many of these greenhouses were located along present day Lincoln Avenue and Winnemac Street. With more Luxembourgers switching to greenhouses, they started dominating these outlying Chicago neighborhoods.

Clarence Hess (West Ridge resident) remembers his parents going to work in the greenhouses with his grandparents. Another Rogers Park resident, Catherine Lulling,

(interviewed in 1926) remembers her father and her family coming to Chicago and taking up truck farming. Her father's farm extended from Peterson and Devon and also from Campbell to Western. The land was not cultivated when they bought it so they had to dig and water but the farm turned out to be a success. "With all our hard work, we had our pleasures," one of the family remembered.

The Luxembourgers were major agricultural contributors in Chicago and they still survive as greenhouse owners. Greenhouses are still owned and operated by Luxembourgers and their families in suburbs such as Niles or Des Plaines. They were responsible for cultivating major crops around the time of the Civil War and after the war, were responsible for creating the greenhouses needed to grow flowers for the surrounding cemeteries. Without the Luxembourgers, greenhouses and truck farms may not have flourished and the surrounding communities may not have prospered and evolved as they did.

Present-day Chicago does not contain the farms and greenhouses it once did. Residential and commercial interests have replaced them. Now, farming and flower growing have evolved into major corporations competing with the small family owned businesses of years past. While some family owned businesses have survived the majority of them have become a page in history.

[From: Lyman A. Budloug, *Album of Geneology and Biography* (1897); "The Budloug Greenhouses," *American Florist* (Feb. 16, 1907); Stephen Bedell Clark, *The Lakeview Saga*; Chicago Tribune, "Metrouix-Rogers Park Historical Society", [www.entertainment.metrouix.chicagotribune.com/top/1,1419,M-Metrouix-Visiting-Attractions; Conservation and Restoration, http://www.fdpcc.com/tier.php?content_id=19&file=cnr-19d2](http://www.entertainment.metrouix.chicagotribune.com/top/1,1419,M-Metrouix-Visiting-Attractions;Conservation%20and%20Restoration,http://www.fdpcc.com/tier.php?content_id=19&file=cnr-19d2) (Sept.22, 2003); Mary Jo Doyle, Martin Lewin, and Neal Samors, *Chicago's Far North Side; Neighborhoods within Neighborhoods*; Kirmes in Luxembourg, <http://www.igd-leo.lu/igd-leo/emigration/kirmes.html> (Sept. 22, 2003); Looking for Luxembourgers, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~rwguide/lesson26.htm> (Sept.23, 2003); Luxembourgers in America, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/eruropean/imlu/lumex.html> Sept.21, 2003); Luxembourgers in Chicago, <http://www.eskimo.com/~lisanne> (sept.21, 2003); Dominie A. Pacyga and Ellen Skeret, *Chicago; Rogers Park West Ridge Historical Society*, www.wecaretoo.com/Organizations/IL/rphws; Andreas Simon, Chicago.]